Sapientia Global Journal of Arts, Humanities and Development Studies (SGOJAHDS), Vol.3 No.2 June, 2020; p.g. 48 – 60; ISSN: 2695-2319 (Print); ISSN: 2695-2327 (Online)

A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE MORAL LIMITATIONS IN MENKITI'S CONCEPT OF PERSONHOOD.

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Abstract
The human person has become in our time the center of experimental science more than ever before. Indeed, we get the type of society we deserve. And this depends on the measure of the quality of persons in any given society. There are a host of many things that compete with the human person in terms of value. The reality is that such values score quite low in comparison to the value inherent in the human person. Every human endeavor, be it cultural, socio-political, and economical draws its meaning and significance in the measure in which it revolves around or points to the human person in all his existentiality. When the human person at any particular phase of his life is stripped of his rights and dignity it spells doom for the society. This is especially true when a person is considered purely from a normative angle. The normative consideration that stripped personhood off the child at infant stage is a case in point; this being a position vehemently defended by Menkiti. The reality is that such a standpoint is bound to raise serious moral issues. The objective of this article is, therefore, to discuss some of these moral lapses in Menkiti's concept of personhood. It will also address the issue of the restriction of individual freedom- a position that draws its inspiration from Menkiti interpretation of Mbiti's dictum: ''I am because we are, and because we are, therefore, I am.''

Keywords: Analysis, Moral, Limitation, Personhood, Menkiti.

Introduction

That man is unique but in plural is a proven fact from time immemorial. Among created beings, the human person is the only one that can give meaning to his life, existence and other

things. The traditional understanding of the human person as a composite of body and soul has serious existential significance and implications. Body and soul refer respectively to the material and spiritual dimensions of man's constitution. The body component points to the nature that man shares with other created beings within the temporal sphere. The soul component points to that aspect of man that orients him to the divine, and which accounts for his spiritual aspirations. The way and manner of conceiving a person varies from culture to culture. Individualist societies consider the human person as an atomic being, with little or nothing to do with others. It is the other way round with the community-oriented societies, wherein what matters is the person's relational capacity. This relational capacity does not stop at the horizontal plane alone, but takes a vertical turn to connect to extra-sensible realities like God or gods.

The vertical relationship is important as it captures and grounds the person's source of freedom, dignity and respect in God. The human person is usually looked upon from the perspectives of metaphysics, social relationship and morality. The metaphysical embodies both the ontological and the relational aspects of a person in Igbo society. This is a position clearly maintained by T. Okere in his philosophy of hermeneutics. The social is very much akin to the moral as both harp on mutual respect and reciprocal human relationships that engender peaceful co-existence in society. Fundamentally, human personality is something intrinsic. Any attempt to define a person from the outside or to reduce him to the sum of his relationships in society is bound to bring with it conflicting moral issues that would undermine the much coveted rights and dignity of the human person. The idea that a person is more than the sum of the relations he bears with others in society does not require any head splitting arguments for its acceptance. Individualist societies witnessed constant struggles that featured efforts to establish a certain harmony between the human person and his society. Plato is credited with the saying that the 'state is the individual's writ large.' This means that the individual is prior to the state, such that any excellence that is present in the state, first pre-existed in the individual. Jean Jacque Rousseau demonstrated great passion in defense of the sovereign power that should be accorded to the individual in society. He believes that the human being is by nature good, and that corruption came by way of the establishment of institutions.

G. W. F. Hegel puts stress on recognition (*Anerkennung)* that should be accorded to the individual so as to safeguard his rights from abuse. The Hegelian individual or person asserts himself in order to enforce this recognition. His motivation does not spring from any utilitarian intent, but that the other must recognize his claim to superiority. And again, he is not driven by reason but by the sheer quest for the realization of his desires and whims. His ultimate aim is simply to achieve the ambition of extraordinariness. However, an irony plays out in the end; according to Ulrich Steinvorth, the individual achieves 'reason and freedom' that make possible the enactment of his capabilities. (2009: 51). Contrariwise, community-oriented societies give priority to the community, and make the individuals play a kind of 'second fiddle role.' This seems to obtain in Igbo community to which Menkiti belongs. Hence this article will contend Menkiti's thoughts on personhood, and declare such as falling short of representing the realities of Igbo community so described. Hence we shall adopt the following procedure: first, we will embark on conceptual clarification of the concepts of *community*, *communitarianism*, *individuum*, *personhood*, and *common good*. Second, we shall

examine in depth Menkiti's ideas or thoughts on personhood. Third, we shall look at the moral limitations generated by his views on the human person. Fourth, we will cap up our presentation.

Conceptual Clarification

The elucidation of these concepts will help to show that Menkiti's views are greatly flawed, and should not be swallowed hook, line, and sinker.

1) Community:

The original word used to designate the community is *umunna*. Literally, *umunna* means the children of the same father. Starting from the family and thus extending to the clan, the *umunna* grows into the community or village or tribe or to the size of a town. Hence every individual is carried along under the one umbrella of the family or community and so on. All family members share in whatever the father bequeaths to his children. Here is a natural community established by a common bond of solidarity expressible in ''common roles, values, obligations, meanings or understanding,'' according to Gyekye (1997: 43). John Mbiti expresses the African idea about the centrality of community thus: ''I am because we are and because we are therefore I am.'' While substantiating this, Menkiti explains that the 'we' is not the additive but a thoroughly fixed collective 'we.' Further, he distinguishes three senses of human groupings, namely, ''the collectivities in the truest sense, the constituted human groups, and the random collection of individuals.' He identifies African communities with the first to which the Igbo belongs, given reasons of their ''organic dimension to the relationship between the component individuals.'' (Wright: 179- 180).

2) Communitarianism:

The communitarian principle governs a life that revolves around the community of persons. A variant of Communitarianism, of the type championed by Menkiti, Mbiti and Wiredu sees the community as an end in itself. Some others like Gyekye do not take the community as an end in itself. For one reading Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, it is easy to see that in a communitarian setup the interest of the individual is embedded in that of the community, so much so that the idea of hierarchy entrenched in Igbo political arrangement does not in any way jeopardize the equality of membership in politics. Hence Kwame Gyekye (1997: 42) would advocate for a moderate communitarianism that considers the community as a fundamental good, and in which individuals must live in harmony with others; supported by a life of mutual corporation and interdependence between the community and her individual persons.

3) Individuum:

Igbo communities do not support atomic individuals. This is another way of saying that persons are relational beings. The underlying belief is that individual persons function much better when they are not isolated from the community. The good thing is that the community sees to it that the interests of the individual persons are well represented and defended. Of interest is that the community sees as her responsibility the bringing to full flowering individual potentials without which the community remains atrophied. It is not without reason then that a person is depicted as a relational category. By a relational category we mean that he can dialogue or communicate through language, and can contribute meaningfully to

society. Language plays a significant role of revealing not only the personality of the speaker but also his needs. A particular individual alone does not meet all the needs, but must require the full cooperation of others in a reciprocal supportive gesture of give and take. In the words of T. Okere, the human person is a ''congenitally communitarian self, and incapable of being, existing and really unthinkable … except in the complex relations of the community.'' (2015: 565-566). The community is saddled with the responsibility of meeting the needs of the individual, and actually helping him develop his potentials. Often the community comes to the help of the individual through manual labor. Her help is ready to the needy members in times of, say, bereavement and natural disaster. Still, at other times a communal palm plantation could be harvested and sold to support the education of a brilliant child from a less wealthy family.

History attests that some with exceptional talents were sponsored overseas through communal sacrifice and effort. The whole idea is that the community pulls her resources together in order to raise, care and nurture a child. It is believed that the community stands to benefit from the child's resourcefulness in the end. There is also a moral underpinning to communal relationships. It is this: no one lives for himself and no one dies alone. Because he finds himself in the community of others, it requires that he must act within certain moral bounds in respect of their freedom and rights as persons of dignity. Moral responsibility is naturally predicated on the relational capacity of persons in society, and as such does not deprive the individual of his freedom or make him become subservient to the community.

4) Personhood:

The Latin *prosopon*, meaning 'face', refers to a mask won at theatrical performances, but which later came to depict a person's role in real life. The legal angle associates a person with the ''bearer of rights and obligations,'' to whom actions can be attributed, and who could be held responsible for such actions. No doubt, the normative consideration would appropriate this legal dimension to endanger the rights of infants who could as yet perform any such roles in society. Immanuel Kant, in his categorical imperative on the universal moral principles, argues that morality is based on human reason alone. By this singular act, it is easy to read into Kant the fact that a person is one who has rationally come of age, with the obvious implication of completely ruling out infants in this rational framework. This same thought reechoes in Boethius definition of personhood that underscores rationality as a defining feature of humanity.

The reality, we must acknowledge, is that these definitions owe their inspiration to our philosophical forebears, especially Plato and Aristotle. Plato's idea of individuation is captured in his theory of forms that separates essence from existence, and puts them in two different worlds. Aristotle's hylemorphic theory allows that essence and existence co-exist in material things, including the human person. Because of their fragmentary dispositions at base about beings in general, these definitions are no longer attractive to the postmodern man with an inclusive disposition. Moreover such a thinking pattern does not fit into the Igbo (African) mode of thought that embraces concreteness of existence. Which is to say that definitions about persons no longer follow the definition of substance in the Aristotelian-Thomistic sense of that which is ''undivided in itself, but divided from everything else, and is

completely on its own.'' Neither is it limited to Boethius' definition of a person as ''an individual substance of a rational nature.'' (Ifube, 11).
Against the definition of a person as an isolated individual, a person is seen more as a relational being. And against Boethius definition with emphasis on rationality (and the exclusion of the body in the conception of personhood), other factors are considered relevant such as ''moral agency, rationality, language or cognitive skills such as intentionality and self-awareness and the ability to establish suitable relationship with other persons.'' (Ifube, 11). The inclusion of body and soul safeguards the unity of being in a human person. According to Marcel Onyeocha, what matters for the Igbo (African) is the ''concreteness of existence'' that reflects his mode of thought and that puts him into immediate and personal relationship with the soul of the world, with God and spirit in order to find the guarantee of his or her hope to live as well as evidence of what he or she does not see.'' (1997: 161).

Some philosophers of Western extraction are now beginning to look at personhood from the perspective of the community also. Basing his reflection (not on the classical notion of metaphysics that admits of no change) but on the metaphysics with change or becoming, Ulrich Steinvorth underscores the processual nature of personhood thus:

> These conditions are met at different ages: The capacity of initiating actions is given already with birth; use of propositional language comes next, awareness of dependence on others comes before the age of youth, capability of independent judgment come late; some never attain it. The self develops in steps, starting from proto-self and advancing by degrees to full-fledged self. (2009: 22-23).

Interestingly, Steinvorth names two conditions necessary to arrive at a full-fledged person to include the use of propositional language and the awareness of one's dependence on others, preceded as it were, by the capacity of initiating actions. However his processual personhood contrasts sharply with the Igbo (Africa) metaphysical stand on personhood. Personhood in Igbo cosmology is an ontological concept with relational capacities. What remains indisputable is his idea that the individual needs the community, especially, for the development of language skills necessary for propositional thought and mutual reciprocity. Part of the reason for human integration in the community is to accommodate the individual's needs as well as offer him a wider scope for self-development. It is argued that in the absence of language as an agent of socialization, there is no room for becoming human persons.

The reason according to Wiredu is that a human being deprived of the socializing influence of communication becomes a merely 'biological human person' but mentally bound to be 'subhuman.' (1996: 13). In essence, it is communication that makes the community, and even human persons; and the absence of which would render individuals 'lower animals.' (1996: 21). So far, we have seen that the idea of personhood has a wider understanding and application than in its traditional notion.

5) Common good:
The term of 'common good' refers to that good that is commonly owned by a political community. The idea about the common good according to Kwame Gyekye (1997: 45) is that

it connotes the idea of sharing that belongs to two or more persons as the case may be. It is common, not because it is derived from the sum total of individual interests or preferences of the constituting members of the community; rather it is a good that is common to the individual human beings, and can be said to be commonly, universally, shared by all human beings in the society. He further opines that the commonality of the good derives from our common humanity and not from any individual, or his preferences. By its nature common good refers to those basic needs whose satisfaction is necessary for the attainment of a fulfilled life of the individual in society. Accordingly, those needs range from food to shelter through equal opportunity to freedom. In what follows, we shall offer a bird's eye view of Menkiti's thoughts on the human person. This will help us to assess the moral limitations in his work.

The Human Person in Menkiti's Thoughts

Most of the ideas or thoughts of Menkiti on personhood are predicated on his understanding of a person as a cultural being. This means that his thoughts about humans are gleaned from his conception of a human being. The concept of 'person' is used here interchangeably with individual, though, without glossing over the subtle nuances between them. His views on the human person could be summarized as follows: a) the individual is not abstractly defined but must be defined in relation to the community. He equally holds to the superiority of the community in being and in knowledge over the individual, with the result that the community confers personhood on the individual. With this, he concludes that the individual is a communal being, b) because the attainment of personhood is not automatic from birth; it must involve a process to become a person. It follows then that infants, anti-social persons would be disqualified as persons or socially integrated persons; c) that the gradual process of becoming persons is only possible through social and ritual incorporation.

What this amounts to is that all human persons are not ontologically equal as some are more ontological than others. Therefore he refers to the two most important phases of human life: the cradle and the grave as 'depersonalized points of reference,' an 'it.' By this he means that an 'it' accompanies individuals on coming into the world, and does same as they depart from the world. The reason for assuming that infants and ancestors are 'depersonalized points of reference', say, an 'it'; is that they lie outside the sphere of social and ritual incorporation. Finally, Menkiti calls this sort of conception 'maximal' in contrast to the 'minimal' conception characteristic of the West. This he captures as follows:

> … personhood is the sort of thing which has to be achieved, the sort of thing at which individuals could fail. . . . the approach to persons in traditional thought is generally speaking a maximal in contradistinction to such minimalist requirements as the presence of consciousness, memory, will, soul, rationality, or mental function. The project of being or becoming persons. . . stretches beyond the raw capabilities of the isolated individual. (2004: 326).

Menkiti represents the view that for one to qualify as a person, it is necessary that one shows the capability to fulfill certain societal functions. And if one fails to satisfy this condition, one would naturally forfeit the rights that belong to a genuinely human person. He believes also that through the mediatory role of the community in the education of its members help would come to effect the possible transformation of what is biologically given into a social selfhood

(1984: 173). Part of the reason for which he allows that a person be conceived as an ''extended self'' may come from the education that the community provides at the cradle for the child's development. This may be necessary but not sufficient to prove that the community is productive of persons. But what can we make out of a person as an extended self? In his ''Normative Conception of a person'' Menkiti explains his idea of an extended self:

> Its sense is not that of a person speaking on behalf of, or in reference to, another, but rather of an individual, who recognizes the source of his or her own humanity, and so realizes, with internal assurance, that in the absence of others, no grounds exist for a claim regarding the individual's own standing as a person. (2004: 324).

Apart from being an extended self, the individual does not qualify as Menkiti claimed in the maximal definition for a person in contrast to its minimal requirements. However, the use of the concepts of *maximal* and *minimal* by Menkiti needs some clarification. Godfrey Onah (2005: 172) is at pains to elucidate them. For him, minimal, as a concept, would refer to whatever is common to all the members of a genius. He labels the concept maximal a misnomer and inconsistent, and thus argues that considering the maximum that each individual member can attain in its development, it would be difficult to fix the boundaries, which is what definition is all about.

He thus concludes that there must be in Menkiti's anthropology a conflation of the concept of the person with its perfection. For him, the use of the concept maximum is best applied to a ''fully developed person.'' And this must follow that ''one is a person before becoming a fully developed person.'' We must, therefore, state in categorical terms that the denial of ontological equality of all human beings is unacceptable. It means then that Menkiti's argument in favor of the 'depersonalized points of reference' in his 'it-argument' should be voided. Menkiti would have us believe in his 'it-argument' that human beings come into the world an 'it' and depart from it an 'it.' He specifically mentions infants and ancestors. This must be a tall claim given that there is little or no justice done to the meaning of the pronoun 'it' in well-known languages. The meaning of the pronoun 'it' in Igbo culture to which the author himself belongs will prove this. The word that stands for the pronoun 'it' is 'o' and this covers the three genders of neuter, male and female, whether young or old. Since it can be applied to all genders without exception, it may be argued, that no other reason is enough to justify its application to the child to mean a deprivation of personhood. (2005: 173).

Similarly, Menkiti makes the same case for the identity of an ancestor, designating him as 'it' since he lies beyond the realm of ritual incorporation and ontological progression that makes personhood possible. He admits that the ancestors retain their personhood (personal immortality) as long as the living could still keep track of their memories, but denies their identity in the absence of this capacity. This would then mean that they have slid into namelessness or collective immortality which invariably means an 'it.' This position, at any rate, seems plausible.

A counter argument is possible. In the same passage under reference, Menkiti follows the reasoning supplied by Mbiti to argue to the indispensability of personal names as

embodiments of selves. But his argument changes shortly with the claim that the ancestors lose their identities so long as the memories of the ancestors are no longer called to mind by their living relatives. He sounds convinced, and even dogmatic, that this scenario puts them in the limbo of collective immortality or namelessness. What Menkiti means to say is that the retention of the names of the dead ancestors by their living relatives is considered powerful in perpetuating their existence in the spirit-world. Contrariwise, the non-retention of such names would render the ancestors non-existent. The reason he gives is that they now find themselves in a realm where incorporation and ontological progression are no longer obtainable. But what Menkiti may have succeeded in demonstrating in his claim is not so much the fact of the non-existence of or depersonalized reference to the ancestors (as it belongs to the human memory to forget, for what is forgotten does still exist) as to the fact that names are embodiments of personhood or selves, and selves that not even death would be able to put an end.

There is another claim of his that raises another serious moral concern in which it is said that personhood is not automatic from birth, but must be achieved through some kind of process that involves social and ritual incorporation. We submit here that personhood is indestructible and ascribable to all phases of biological human life and even beyond. Obviously, there is a poor handling of the 'concept of personhood,' as if it obeys the rules of arithmetic or geometric progression. Personhood is a concept, and should not be treated as a biological entity that enjoys some kind of quantitative and qualitative growth. It is high time that those who oppose the personhood of children have a rethink, and abandon their misguided slogan on personhood, and which according to Flack and Pelligrino reads: ''the higher the achievement, the higher the credit.'' (1992: 104). This instruction is important for the interest of humanity. To become a person does not require fulfilling any conditions as if one is laboring to acquire a chieftaincy title.

Kwame Gyekye (1992: 108) reiterates that personhood derives from our common humanity, and should not hang on the fulfillment of any conditions. He rather argues in the manner of saying that action follows being. That is, without that which is fundamental (to be), no action would possibly flow. It is our common humanity that makes possible any other temporal acquisition of any kind. Therefore, personhood answers the question of what a person is, and not what he acquires; namely, the accidental characteristics such as height, gender, age, and marital or social status. It can further be argued that the human person is never to be compared to the most exalted animal in terms of the richness of his life and achievement. What we should reiterate now is that human identity is intrinsic and not extrinsic. The human person is a composite of body and soul. It is the soul's intricate relationship with the body that makes possible any talk of the spiritual aspirations of man, and this safeguards in principle the rights of man irrespective of whether or not he performs any role; he has rights that flow from his nature as a person. Thus, this makes the investigation of the moral shortcomings of Menkiti's concept of personhood worthwhile.

The Moral Limitations in Menkiti's concept of personhood

The moral problem envisaged here arises out of certain misconceptions about personhood as presented by the author (Menkiti) under study. One such conception fails to ascribe a common nature to all humans, including infants. In that case it is clear that the author did not take

cognizance of the question of ontology that is fundamental to any conception of personhood. It is no surprise that his conception of a person stripped children bare of personhood at a stage deemed one of the most crucial phases in human development. For philosophers with a processual bent, children, especially infants are not considered as persons; for which reason they lack legitimate rights, respect and dignity. While reflecting on the processual personhood as we have seen above, U. Steinvorth impresses it upon us the stark truth that a person needs the community in the way toward full development. One aspect of this development is the language skill. That the human person needs the community for the development of language skills necessary for propositional thought is essentially noteworthy. The community or the family facilitates the socialization and education of the child in the mother tongue.

By way of recapitulation, Kwasi Wiredu has underscored the anthropological view of man with roots in communication, and stressed, that the absence of language would affect his true identity as a person. It is in line with these efforts that Menkiti ventured to streamline the relations between human persons in Igbo society. But unfortunately, this brought much discredit to him, judging by the moral difficulties and criticisms that trailed his conception of personhood. For instance, in the statement accredited to Mbiti: ''I am because we are and because we are, therefore I am,'' a possible interpretation could be that the ''we existence'' determines the ''I existence.'' These two levels of existence respectively refer to the community and the individual. It is from here that Menkiti takes his departure. But if what Menkiti said about the human person is true, it would mean that the idea of the community determining the individual person could jeopardize human freedom. There are a number of other startling statements credited to Menkiti on the human person. Some of these views may either in part or whole be repeated here with the specific intent of examining their moral limitations: a.) that the human person is not abstractly defined but in relation to the community considered superior to the individual. And b.), the attainment of personhood is not automatic from birth; it involves a process, such that one could fail while trying to achieve it.

The contribution is contained in his publication, ''On Normative Conception of a Person''. It reads in part ''... personhood is the sort of thing which has to be achieved, the sort of thing at which individuals could fail. (2004: 326). He equally states that the human person is a communal being, to the extent that he becomes an extended self in relation to the community. Actually Menkiti portrays the human person as a functional being, and subservient to the community. For this reason, he makes the community lord it over the individual. In point of fact, his interest is on the relations between human persons and their communities. What can we say in reality that makes a person a person? Is it something extrinsic to the individual or not? It is pertinent to know at this juncture that being precedes functionality, in much the same way that it precedes possession. But apart from that, the reasoning of those who emasculate children of personhood crumbles even in the face of the application of Anarchists' moral principles.

The Anarchists place human and animal natures on an equal par, and say, that their moral motivation springs from a common source in order to arrive at a common end, namely, the avoidance of pain and the enjoyment of pleasure, aimed at preserving their respective species. But if the Anarchist moralists could see no difference between human and animal natures (and we know that human life is superior to animal life), why should the Norm-guided

philosophers like Menkiti consider it below human dignity to see children or infants as persons and as potential moral beings? What Gyekye said concerning human nature overrides what is revealed in Anarchist morality. It is said that man is the maker as well as the product of culture. Pertinent to ask is, what does culture actually produce in man and what it does not? To this, Kwame Gyekye gives an insightful response:

> Besides being a social being by nature, the human individual is, also by nature, other things as well. By ''other things,'' I have in mind such essential attributes of the person as rationality, having a moral sense and capacity for virtue and, hence, for evaluating and making moral judgments: all this means that the individual is capable of choice . . . (1997: 53).

The truth about the author's statement here is that man is not wholly conditioned or determined either by the culture or community. The ''other things'' that lie outside the realm of culture as revealed to us by the passage should compel us to respect the personality of the child, as coming from the author of life, God. Is this not enough then to nullify the denial of fundamental ''ontological equality of all human beings'' as championed by Menkiti in his it-argument? Menkiti asserts that one is an 'it' on coming into the world, and that one leaves the world an 'it. The reality is that the human person transcends the temporal realm of existence. It is always a big problem when culture is elevated to philosophy. Menkiti's reference to ritual and social incorporation as necessary in the making of persons makes our point clearer.

This study calls, therefore, for a return to a proper way of philosophizing. It is in response to this call that we revisit the much talked about limitations imposed on individual human freedom in Menkiti's community. It is credited to J. J. Rousseau that 'human beings are free but everywhere in chains.' To our mind, the understanding that should flow from this is that no one does command absolute freedom anywhere. When one thinks of one's fellow in a community, that alone tells one that there is a limit to what one can do or even say. The community to which Menkiti lives and philosophizes cannot be an exception. We submit again that neither the community nor God can strip man of his 'relative' freedom. Menkiti obviously thinks differently as he interprets John Mbiti's statement: 'I am because we are and because we are, therefore, I am.' We make bold to appeal to 'Kantian error' to adequately respond to Menkiti, and to those of like minds. Kant, for one, erroneously anchored morality on human reason alone, and vehemently fought against bringing in any heteronomous factors such as God, since this would inhibit human freedom to full expression. For him, the idea of God would militate against and vitiate man's full use of his freedom.

Karl Peschke (1996: 32-33) has argued, on the contrary, that this is not so, since the human person who does not enjoy independence on the existential level cannot do so in the order of action. He further argues that whatever problem associated with human freedom does not come from God, but, that human enslavement comes by relying on person or thing; thus maintaining that human freedom is fully realized when man acts in consonance with the will of God. It stands to reason to argue contrary to Menkiti (with regard to the freedom of the human person in Igbo community) that he is totally a free being, even when he is seen to heavily depend on the community. Then, it is a dependence that helps him to bring his potentials to full maturity, and, which does not in any way impede his way to success in life.

The same reason could be adduced in the case of the personhood of children or infants. For the fact that they depend on adults at a certain stage of growth does not mean they are not persons. To take them as non-persons would mean to misconstrue the very import of developmental stages of growth. Life is not based squarely on the straightjacket of give and take or the so-called *quid pro quo*. That would be to base life on human selfishness.

At some particular time or the other, we may be called to make sacrifices on behalf of others. And this is precisely the sense that this elemental stage wishes to communicate. The employment of a religious word 'sacrifice' says in a word that human culture is not purely materialistic. We show a deep sense of understanding when we recognize the fact that human life represents 'full life' in contrast to animal life; and that this 'fullness of life' for human beings does not come from man, but God. And since it does come from God who is eternal, without beginning or end, it means then that human life as we experience it, extends beyond the here and now, to even generations yet unborn. In the same vein, the fullness of life, which we claim for all humans without exception, must include personhood as well. This is because everything (including personhood) springs from God who is 'I am who I am' (Cf. Exodus 3:14). Invariably, any genuine community that recognizes its rootedness in God must respect the personhood of infants especially. No doubt, Menkiti's vision of transcendence seems greatly blurred. For Ekedobe, this should be a cause for grave concern:

> that millions of children worldwide have been subjected to a lot of painful and inhuman conditions, (and that) crimes against kids range from domestic ill treatments at home by parents, siblings and guardians, child labour, child trafficking, slavery, including involvement of children in guerilla wars in some parts of the war-raged African countries and developing nations of the world. (2011:10).

Regrettably, not much has been done to address the issue of child abuse. Most people who abuse children in this way obviously do not regard them as persons of equal dignity and respect. The implication then is that they should be used to satisfy their selfish cravings. But they must have a rethink in the light of the moderate stance of Kwame Gyekye, who believes that individual human persons are not deprived of their worth as persons based on any factors. Thus he argues:

> A human person is a person whatever his age or social status. Personhood may reach its full realization in community, but it is not acquired or yet to be achieve as one goes along in society. What a person acquires are status, habits, and personality or character traits: he, qua person, thus becomes the subject of the acquisition, and being thus prior to the acquisition process, he cannot be defined by what he acquires. One is a person because of what he is, not because of what he has acquired. (1992: 108).

The same follows for human freedom and autonomy that are inviolable. In his *Identity and Change* T. Okere (1996: 152-159) who belongs to the same cultural world as Menkiti takes a hermeneutical interpretation of the Igbo word 'onwe' and shows that the human person in Igbo society is a free agent. 'Onwe' is the Igbo word for self or personhood. Literally, it comes

from Igbo root word 'nwe,' meaning 'to own.' This etymology reveals 'onwe' as a 'self-owner,' which invariably embodies the idea of freedom. There exist, according to Gyekye, the possibility and capability for 'choice' in the execution of a person's 'plans and goals.' (1992: 112). He then harps on a person's capacity for self-assertion. Autonomy is implicated in self-assertion without which human plans and goals would remain in the limbo of clumsy vision and unrealized dreams.

And there is a clear message here: that human freedom cannot be caged or determined by another. No one can claim to have the power to possess another by way of chaining his or her freedom. Gyekye argues that human plans and goals are not always for the right ones, but also for the wrong purposes. The reason he gives is that a moral agent is not ''morally determined to pursue the good.'' The truth of this is evident in appellations of self-assertion, self-determination, and responsible actions.

Conclusion

Our carefully, but philosophically articulated piece has proven that the human person in Menkiti's community is not stripped of his freedom. Personhood is not by way of conferment by any institution. Our argument did expose the moral shortcomings in Menkiti's concept of personhood. We established with clarity that personhood is not a discriminatory concept. The full meaning of personhood cannot sufficiently be grasped by appeal to any cultural or social considerations. It is more of an ontological reality that incorporates transcendence. It is this dimension that takes care of the spiritual aspirations of man. Human freedom and autonomy are concepts that are not culturally determined. We argued that there is mutual reciprocity between human person and his community. This reciprocal relationship is an enabler in a person's life toward the realization of his potentials. It is another way of saying that the community does not constitute any danger to human freedom. She rather enhances it. To say, according to Gyekye (1997:53) that a person possesses rationality, or has a moral sense, or capacity for virtue, and for evaluating and making moral judgment and for choice - and we know that these are not the creations of the community – only strikes a strong note as well as sends the strongest signal that personhood is not 'fully defined and constituted by any communal structure or social relationships.

Menkiti's exaggerated thoughts that deprived infants of personhood have been thoughtfully challenged, by appeals to ontological or transcendental dimensions to human personality. We reiterate once more that the human person is unique but in plural. And unless we recognize this plurality in the conception of personhood, and see it (personhood) as ontological and not as a discriminatory concept, our society will continue to reap the 'untold moral evil' as a consequence. The danger therein must be exposed and the caveat well noted as Davenport puts it:

> The human being must not be treated as a mere means to some other ends (such as for example the state), but must be regarded as an end in himself. His self-fulfilment is an indispensable goal of human life and that society is backward, unjust, and even evil, that does not promote it. (1955: 230).

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